

Shaping the Hearts

of Kids with Special Needs



featuring



An Angel in Umbros

In this issue . . .

An Angel in Umbros	1-2
Age-level Helps	3-14
Tips and Encouragements	15

The year I began my full-time children’s ministry position, my son turned three years old. He was also diagnosed with autism that year. The teachers in our congregation wanted to teach Noah, but no one—including me—knew how to reach into autism and pull Noah out. We all felt utterly

that if he would only give it a try, I could transfer him to another age group after a few months.

A few weeks after the fall quarter began, Jeffrey came to me with a proposal. He began by saying, “Miss Vangie, I think Noah can do more than he is letting on. If you’ll let me, I’d like to see what he can do. Can I work with him weekly?” Speechless, I nodded a weak yes, retrieved Noah from the closet he was hiding in, and went home and cried. Somebody believed in my son. My prayers had been answered.

The challenges that followed that decision were not met without difficulty. Seasoned teachers had to learn to accept the quiet authority of a 14-year-old boy who routinely wore soccer shorts and a T-shirt to services. Eyebrows were sometimes raised as Jeffery began bravely implementing some off-the-wall occupational therapy strategies I had studied. More than once, teachers would be ready to send Noah into the hall when Jeffrey would

“I’m tremendously excited about this new ministry resource. It doesn’t take a miracle to teach children who learn differently—just a leader or teacher who is willing to take a chance and shape a heart.”

--Vangie Shaver, Georgia

hopeless and ill equipped to minister to him.

I routinely utilized middle and high school students during our worship hour to assist adult teachers in the children’s classrooms. That year, Jeffrey simply drew the short straw when he was assigned the 3-year-olds room. I remember promising Jeffrey





continued from p. 1

intervene and say, “Give him a chance. It’s not time to remove him from the classroom yet.”

It may or may not come as a surprise that my angel in Umbro soccer shorts began to reap a harvest for the investment he had placed in my son. As we implemented new strategies, we found that Noah could thrive using the same curriculum all the “normal kids” used. By the end the year, I rarely ever saw Noah during church services because he was simply too busy having his heart shaped.

Jeffrey stayed with Noah for three years. The result? Well, I’ll just say that today Noah can recite the lineage between Abraham and Joseph—forwards and backwards. He learned.

Why do I tell the story of my angel in Umbros? First, I want to convince volunteers that you need not be professionally equipped or perfectly trained to effectively teach children who have special needs. Jeffrey simply believed that Noah was not a wasted effort.

Second, I want it known that every child, no matter his disability or diagnosis, was created by God with a heart to be shaped. Most of the strategies we used with Noah became so effective that the entire class benefited from the accommodations and every heart was shaped each Sunday.

Finally, I want to inspire ministers, teachers, and parents to believe, maybe against all evidence, that a child can succeed. It doesn’t take a miracle to teach children who learn differently—just a leader or teacher who is willing to take a chance and shape a heart.

Vangie Shaver worked in full-time children’s ministry for 12 years. She is the mother of a child who has autism; she is continually adding to her expertise on helping children with special needs through various means of continuing education.

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Fall 2012 *Toddlers & 2s Teacher*.

Toddlers & 2s

While there is a range of developmental disabilities that can be identified at birth, formal diagnoses of many learning disabilities often come after two years of age. As a matter of fact, it is routinely the omission of developmental milestones reached during the second year of life that can indicate potential learning difficulties.

The variety of simple activities in New Life's Toddler & 2s curriculum offers teachers plenty of choices for tailoring the curriculum to meet the needs of children who are developing atypically, or irregularly. Many of the activities are designed to engage children individually, so each child can receive one-on-one attention. A language-rich curriculum, students are prompted over and over again to use the simple language modeled for them by the teacher. The curriculum strives to help you, the teacher, reach children with developmental delays through hands-on instruction, use of simple manipulatives, and age-appropriate teaching cues.

Sing a Story

Repetition of simple songs that reinforce Bible truths allows children to develop confidence within routine. Whether you choose to use the CD to accompany you or simply use your voice, the ease and lilt of the songs attract children who can easily be overstimulated. The repetition of songs and activities each week not only develops safety in routine, but also allows children with auditory delays to predict what will happen next in the lesson and feel more at ease to participate.

Materials

piggyback songs suggested in lessons (optional:
Resources CD, CD player)

Toddlers & 2s

Surprise Boxes

Materials

varies with each lesson

While exploration and discovery can be frightening and anxiety-filled for children with developmental delays, these kinds of activities must be encouraged if children are going to courageously push past their impairments and participate in the world around them. The use of a surprise box is a secure way to allow children to explore a world that might otherwise seem confusing and alarming. Look in each lesson for activities where items can be placed in a bin, box, or basket. Cover the top with a lid, blanket, or piece of cloth. Assure children that what is inside the box is safe for them; encourage them to peek inside.

Activity adaptation for:

“Surprise Boxes,” Lessons 1, 2, 4, 12, and 13; any activity where items can be placed in a bin, box, or basket

What If . . . ?

What if I have a child who cannot point or gesture? Inability to indicate choices or preferences through pointing can be an early warning sign of a delay. Take comfort in knowing that while a child may not be able to demonstrate what he or she is assimilating, this does not mean knowledge is not being transmitted.

What if, despite the language-rich lesson, I have a child in class who is still nonverbal? Development of spoken language can be one of the most arbitrary of developmental skills. Persistence and continued use of simple language is key in providing children who may be developmentally delayed with the opportunity they need to attempt speech. Keep talking to the child.

Books

Books that are durable and efficient are invaluable tools for engaging babies and toddlers. Use the board books included in *Toddlers & 2s Teacher Classroom Pack*; purchase other books that have age-appropriate pictures. Read the simple text and reinforce vocabulary and Bible truths. Engage the child physically and cognitively as you ask questions and encourage the child to point to something specific on each page.

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Fall 2012 *Preschool Teacher*.

Preschool

Meeting Scamper

Materials

Scamper puppet

The use of Scamper, the preschool puppet friend, can be an emotional bridge for children who are apprehensive about what will happen in the classroom. For instance, if Scamper becomes afraid when the classroom becomes too noisy, a child with sensitivity to loud noises will identify with Scamper. Allowing that child to hold Scamper can be a comfort to the child.

Encourage the child with special needs to let you know when Scamper becomes anxious due to loud noises or the uncertainty that accompanies an activity. This is a way for the child to tell you what in the environment is producing anxiety for him as well. This is especially helpful for children who might be delayed in their speech. Encourage them to be Scamper's special friends. When they think Scamper is afraid, they can care for him in the same way God cares for them when they are afraid or in a new place.

Activity adaptation for:

"Here Comes Scamper," p. 6; can be used in all lessons

Joyful Noise?

Materials

behind-the-head ear warmers

Provide behind-the-head ear warmers for students who show an aversion to singing, loud noises, or activities that encourage clapping and shouting. Not only will this allow the child to observe the activity with reduced anxiety, it also frees up hands that the child might otherwise have clasped over his ears. If possible, keep the ear warmers in a place where the child can access them independently as needed. Doing this will allow you to observe exactly which noises or frequencies the child perceives as loud. Encouraging children to advocate for their own needs, while at the same time participating in each activity, is a healthy habit for children with learning differences to employ.

Activity adaptation for:

Sing and Pray, every lesson; "Hear Our Song," Lesson 3; "The Kitchen Parade," Lesson 8; "Power Tune," Lesson 11; "Terrific Trumpet," Lesson 12

Special Needs Tip:

Ear warmers designed to attach behind the head are often preferred over those that cross the crown of a child's head, as the top of the head is more sensitive.

“Dry” Water Alternative

Materials

blue hair gel; small, plastic toys of animals that live in water; large resealable bags (optional: duct tape)

Before class, fill a resealable plastic bag with blue hair gel. Insert small plastic toys of water animals. Make sure you use animals that don't have pointy sides, as these may puncture the bag. Firmly seal the bag. To prevent leaking, either insert this bag into a second bag, or seal the seam with duct tape.

Say, **Water is just one of the great things in the world God made. We use water to wash ourselves. Water can be fun to play in. Let's pretend to play in water and see the animals God made to live there.** Place the prepared bag flat on the table. Allow children to run their fingers over the bag. Encourage them to touch, without the discomfort of getting their hands wet, and discover the animals God made to live in water. (Note: For a child with tactile defensiveness, asking a child to touch something that looks like water might be frightening at first. However, finding a nonthreatening way to bring the child closer to the fun may help her overcome her anxieties about water in the future.)

For Lesson 5, allow children to “float” an object on the bag as if it were baby Moses. Talk about keeping Moses safe as he floats on the water. For Lessons 7 and 11, encourage children to draw their fingers in a straight line across the bag to make “dry ground” in the Red Sea and Jordan River for God's people to walk across. Using their fingers in a walking motion lets the children participate in walking through water.

Activity adaptation for:

“Water Works” or “Sand and Seashells,” Lesson 1; Bible Time, Lesson 5; “Exploring Water,” Lesson 7; Bible Time, Lessons 5, 7, and 11

Special Needs Tip:

This activity can be a fun alternative for any child who avoids water or a child who might be in danger of damaging a hearing aid or listening device if it become wet. The adaptation is very versatile and can be used for any story that includes water!

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Fall 2012 *Pre-K & K Teacher*.

Pre-K & K

Children with most varieties of special needs have a central nervous system that is underdeveloped for their age. Often times the five senses we employ to teach our lessons in interactive ways can be a dangerous minefield of sights, sounds, and textures. Avoiding sensory teaching is not the answer. Rather, we must seek to integrate sensory teaching at a slower pace. While a multisense activity may be a welcome activity for children who are developing typically, those who are struggling to integrate senses into their world can become easily overwhelmed and anxious. Units centering on creation and our bodies regularly employ methods of hands-on touching, seeing, and hearing. Below are a few tips for integrating multisensory teaching in a classroom with children who avoid sensory activities.

Hearing More

When approaching an activity, ask yourself the following question: “How many senses are involved?” For children who learn differently, the more senses involved in an activity, the more difficult, distracting, and overpowering the activity can be. The result is often a complete avoidance of such activities.

Just making yourself aware of all the senses needed to accomplish an activity can help you better identify with the anxiety of a child with sensory sensitivity. In many lessons, the *Especially for 4s!* suggestions have deleted one or more steps and/or senses from an activity. For instance, omitting the song or limiting sounds in an activity lessens the sensory input and stimulation, thus allowing a child to process the remaining senses more fully with less anxiety. In these cases, hearing less is hearing more!

Activity adaptation for:

“Ball Toss Thank-You,” Lesson 2; “Listen Up! Sounds” and “I’ve Got Rhythm,” Lesson 3; “Thank-You Tent,” Lesson 11

Sniff It Out

Materials

Scout

While we often can process smells as almost an afterthought, additional smells can be alarming to children with special needs. The same is true for feeling certain textures. Be aware that what may feel like a soft cloth to you, may feel like sandpaper to a child with sensory sensitivity.

Don't be overwhelmed! The answer for these potential obstacles may be found in utilizing the pre-K & K puppet friend, Scout. When an activity calls for a child to touch or smell something that he or she might have an aversion to, allow the child to hold Scout and let the puppet feel or smell the object. Scout can whisper in your ear that something "feels rough" or "smells yummy." Allowing the puppet friend to explore the unknown first may encourage a child to push past his or her own boundaries and try to touch or smell the object. In this way, your classroom might become the very first place a child safely experiences the wonderful smells and textures of God's creation!

Activity adaptation for:

"Touch and Guess Time," Lesson 1; "Touch Walk," "The Nose Knows!," and "Edible Dough," Lesson 3; "Desert Sand," Lesson 6; "Taste Test," Lesson 8

Seek and Find

Materials

varied

Repetition is a wonderful teacher. As adults, sometimes we are bored by routine. Children, however, often find comfort in a pattern. This quarter's lessons include a number of variations on the favorite childhood game, hide-and-seek. Because these activities use very few sensory items, every child can be involved in the fun, including children who might be overwhelmed by other parts of a lesson. The hide-and-seek activities follow a predictable pattern that provides safety and comfort for children who may sometimes feel threatened at always having to learn how to do something new.

Almost every lesson has an object that can be hidden somewhere in your classroom. Children can look for Scout. They can find letters that spell out special words, such as *God*, *pray*, or *obey*. They can search for picture cards and other visuals included in *Pre-K & K Resources*. Don't discount the power that these simple games can have in introducing and warming up a child to the day's lesson.

Activity adaptation for:

"Hide-and-Seek," "Hidden Treasure," and "Hidden Pictures," Lesson 5; "Scout Goes Exploring," Lesson 10; "Scout's Scavenger Hunt," Lesson 11; any lesson

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Fall 2012 *Early Elementary Teacher*.

Early Elementary

Stand by Me

Materials

pictures of community helpers, reusable adhesive

Student activity pages can be difficult for kids who have learning disabilities or autism. Adapting activities in ways that get students up and moving can help them maintain attention. For this activity, find and cut out pictures that show adults doing a variety of jobs that help other people. Display the pictures on a wall or whiteboard.

Say, **Let's think about jobs people do that help other people. After I read a question, stand next to the picture of the person who might do that job.** Ask questions, such as "Who could help you with a school project?" "Who will help you when you get sick?" "Which helper can you call if you are lost?"

After kids have identified the people in the pictures with ways they help others, talk about jobs the kids might do. How can their jobs help others?

Activity adaptation for:

"Jobs People Do," *Activities* for Lesson 1

Doing What's Right

Materials

roll paper, marker, construction paper (various colors), pencils, tape

Watch for activities that call for abstract thinking, such as associating an unfamiliar symbol (a water jug) with complex sentences. Remember that these activities may be too difficult for students with language and attention problems. Consider using this adaptation for the "Doing Right Things" activity in Lesson 4.

Before class, draw a large tree trunk with branches on the roll paper. Cut out colorful leaves from the construction paper. Say, **We know that God helps us do right things. What are some right things God helps us do?** As kids call out right things they can do, write their ideas on the roll paper. Distribute the paper leaves and ask kids to write on their leaves one right thing they can do. When finished, the kids can tape their leaves to the tree. Some children may need one-on-one assistance for copying. Other children may need to be asked yes/no questions, such as "Does God help you obey your parents?"

Activity adaptation for:

"Doing Right Things," *Activities* for Lesson 4

Early Elementary

Sort 'em Out

Materials

Activities p. 19, large sheets of construction paper (1 per child), scissors

Sorting pictures has several benefits over circling or connecting pictures with lines. For kids who are easily frustrated with making changes, the sorting allows changes to be made easily and eliminates erasing. For kids who have difficulty with fine motor skills, sorting is easier than using a pencil. And sorting does not require that children remember which objects to circle; they just need to place the pictures in the correct column. Consider using this adaptation for the “I Can, I Can’t” activity in Lesson 8.

Before class, draw a simple, 2-column chart on each sheet of construction paper. Title the columns “I Can” and “I Can’t.” Give each child a chart and copy of *Activities*, page 19. Have children cut out the pictures from the activity page. (*You might want to have the pictures precut for kids who struggle with fine motor skills.*) Say, **Let’s think about things we can and can’t do. Look at the pictures. Sort them into two groups—things you can do and things you can’t do. Place the pictures in the correct column on your chart.**

After kids have sorted the pictures, ask, **What are some other things you can do? What things can’t you do? Everyone can praise God because He can do anything.**

Activity adaptation for:

“I Can, I Can’t,” *Activities* for Lesson 8

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Fall 2012 *Middle Elementary Teacher*.

Middle Elementary

Picture This

Materials

Resources Sheet 2, pictures (see activity), roll paper, markers, reusable adhesive

Kids with learning disabilities or those who have cognitive (thinking, reasoning, or remembering) disabilities may have a difficult time with abstract concepts. Pictures can help them associate biblical language with more concrete, visual representations. Use this adaptation throughout Unit 1 to help kids learn the Bible Memory passage. If needed, shorten the passage for kids who struggle with memorization.

Before class, find pictures that represent key words in the Bible Memory passage. Suggestions: *eternal*—a clock; *heavens*—clouds or sky; *generations*—family picture with children, parents, and grandparents; *established*—picture of someone putting a flag in the ground. Write the Bible Memory in large letters along a length of roll paper.

Read the passage from the Bible Memory poster. Have kids work together to match and attach the pictures over the corresponding printed words on the roll paper. Have students form two groups. Group 1 can read words not pictured, stopping whenever there is a picture and allowing Group 2 to shout out that word.

Activity adaptation for:

“Picture This,” Lesson 1; “It’s All Yours!,” Lesson 2, “A Promise Is a Promise,” Lesson 3

Key Words

Materials

index cards, scissors, marker, reusable adhesive, *Activities* for Lesson 6, Bibles, roll paper

Crossword puzzles can be visually confusing for some students and may cause frustration for those who struggle with fine motor difficulties. Consider using this adaptation for “Examples in Ephesians.”

Before class, cut heart shapes from index cards. Write on each shape one of the words from the crossword puzzle: *love, compassionate, forgiving, obey, truth, helpful, attitude, submit, share, kindness, respect, patient, honor*. Draw a person figure on roll paper and display it on a wall.

Give each student a heart with a word written on it. Have kids who are confident readers find and read aloud the Scripture verses from Ephesians listed in the activity. As the verses are read aloud, other kids should listen for the words printed on their hearts. When kids hear their words, they can attach the hearts to the person figure on the roll paper. After all the verses have been read, review the words and ask, **How might thinking about these words help you get along with others?**

Activity adaptation for:

“Examples in Ephesians,” Lesson 6

Middle Elementary

A Fun Direction

Materials

Activities for Lesson 12,
pencils

“A Fun Direction!” is a great activity to help kids discover the consequences of not following directions, but it might also lead to frustration for kids with special needs. Students with ADHD have a tendency to rush through activities and then become angry and embarrassed when they realize they are mistaken. Students with Asperger’s syndrome and high-functioning autism are rule followers, but they can also be impulsive. Their failure to follow the rules because of impulsivity may result in meltdowns.

Try having two student volunteers demonstrate the activity. One volunteer can rush through all nine steps, exaggerating the actions called for in each step. The second volunteer can do the activity correctly, taking the time to read aloud all directions and then doing only step 5. By having students act this out, other kids will be entertained and everyone will learn the lesson. Ask, **Which student finished first? Which student followed the directions completely and carefully? Can you name a situation when you took your time to follow directions carefully and things worked out well? Let’s talk about obeying God and following His directions.**

Activity adaptation for:

“A Fun Direction!,” *Activities for Lesson 12*

Use these ideas for adapting activities included in Fall 2012 *PreTeen* Teacher:

PreTeen

Join In

Materials

laminated cards with leader descriptions; poster board or whiteboard and markers

Groups are an incredible way to include all students. Handpicked groups assure that students who struggle with reading, writing, and/or attention are included in a group that can help them stay engaged and involved. Choosing group leaders will help to build leadership skills within your classroom. Having the groups already chosen and names posted will alleviate some of the chaos of finding a group and will help make sure all students are included in an appropriate group. Keeping the same groups for a period of time allows friendships and relationships to grow. Students learn teamwork and what is important for working together.

Be sure to provide job descriptions and choose leaders to fit the activity. Possible jobs would be: group leader—facilitates and leads a group positively, keeps the group on task using patience, prays for the group; messenger/speaker—shares results with the rest of the class, reads the Scriptures as needed; scribe/writer—records what the group discusses, writes neatly.

Activity adaptation for:

any activity that calls for forming groups

Game On!

Materials

poster board or whiteboard with rules and guidelines displayed

Unstructured activities may result in students with ADHD being more distracted and hard to control. Following rules, taking turns, and peer relations may be difficult for some students. As teachers, we need to set up students for success. Posting and reviewing rules before each game or competitive activity will help kids know the expectations. Sample rules: 1. Keep your hands and feet to yourself. 2. Be a team player. 3. Be a good winner and loser.

If a student is struggling with an activity, use that person to keep time or the score, or assign him some other type of job. Explaining and role modeling expectations will allow students to know what a team player looks like and how a good winner and good loser should act.

Activity adaptation for:

"Name Those Animals," Lesson 2; "Name That Primate!," Lesson 3; "Who Am I?," Lesson 4; "'Picture This' Persecution," Lesson 6; "Bible Time Risks," Lesson 7; "Snakes and Apples," Lesson 8; "Spiritual Needs Pick-and-Tell," Lesson 13; any activity that includes competition

What Did You Say?

Materials

understanding of students with autism or Asperger's syndrome

Students with autism and Aspergers syndrome often take things literally. Students with autism might display confusion during discussion activities. They may ask a lot of questions or need clarification of what is being discussed, especially when it deals with social situations. Monitor any sarcasm that students use during discussion activities. Discourage the use of sarcasm and encourage patient, positive responses to any student who asks questions.

Activity adaptation for:

"But God Said '...'," Lesson 3; "A Time to Do Right" and "'Speak Boldly' Pocket Cards," Lesson 5; "Dear Percy," Lesson 6; "What If...?" and "Risk-O-Meter Ratings," Lesson 7; "Good or Evil?," "What Do You Think?" and "Good, Clean Fun!," Lesson 8; "Influences" and "Think About It," Lesson 9; "Hidden Forces" and "The STINK Test," Lesson 10; "It Takes a Lot of Trust" and "Meeting the Needs," Lesson 11; "Promise Pointers," Lesson 12; any activity that requires discussion

Transitions

Materials

poster board or whiteboard and markers

Students with autism and Asperger's syndrome struggle with transition and interrupted schedules. Before class, post a schedule of activities you will be doing that day. Post a large schedule on the board; provide small schedules for individual students who struggle with transitions. Giving a student a schedule of activities at the beginning of class can alleviate much of his or her anxiety.

If for some reason you know there is going to be a change in the normal schedule, prepare the students ahead of time to help the transition go more smoothly. Though small interruptions may not seem important to you, they are a big deal for these students. Be careful and aware of these students as they may be the ones who are less engaged with what is going on in the classroom.

Activity adaptation for:

any activity that requires transition

Tips and Encouragements

for families and
volunteers



featuring



Puppet Power!

Children with special needs and/or developmental disabilities can feel very insecure about different classroom environments. While a child may inwardly want to participate, the world with its sounds, senses, and textures might be a frightening place. Building a relationship with a puppet friend can give a child an instant companion who can comfort the child at home and in the classroom. A puppet friend may even help the child express his or her fears.

“Quieter, Please”

Sensitivity to sound is a common characteristic of children with special needs. Often, just anticipating that an activity is going to be loud can produce such anxiety that a child becomes upset at the first indication of noise. Parents can help teachers by making teachers aware of the fact that louder activities may be more challenging for their child. Families and teachers can empower a child to manage noise sensitivity by providing behind-the-head ear warmers, which may relieve stress for both the parent or teacher and the child.

A Note from the Editor



Welcome to *Shaping the Hearts of Kids with Special Needs*. Did you know that based on one survey conducted by the US Department of Health and Human Services, if you have five families with children in your congregation, at least one child may have some kind of special need?

We hope this resource will help you minister to the child with special needs. We have had experts in the field of special education evaluate our New Life Through His Word Children's Curriculum featuring HeartShaper and suggest accommodations you can make so that the activities you plan to use with the “normal” kids in your class can also be used with kids who have special needs.

May God bless you as you teach His beloved children.

Sincerely,

New Life Through His Word
Editorial Staff

Shaping the Hearts of Kids with Special Needs is a teacher resource provided by HeartShaper® Curriculum. Adapted by permission. Permission is granted to reproduce and distribute this resource for ministry purposes only—not for resale.